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THE NEED FOR A MORE OPEN DIPLOMACY ¹

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THERE is no question more important for the future peace of the world than the devising of means by which the will of the people may be made more directly and immediately dominant in foreign relations. I have read pretty extensively the advocates of the old-fashioned secret diplomacy. I find that most of their arguments in favor of undemocratic diplomacy come under two heads. The first is purely technical, and is well summed up in the early chapters of Mr. Lippmann's *Stakes of Diplomacy*. He points out with considerable force the difficulty of consulting the people in the rapidly moving affairs of foreign policy. While his argument on this point is a serious one, others have urged the same view in the form of the *reductio ad absurdum*. They have said that it is perfectly impossible to consult every man in the street. Of course, those of us who are seriously interested in this question of democratizing our diplomacy are not advocates of any such absurdity. It is a question, like all human questions, of more and less. What we are urging, is not that our diplomacy should be absolutely democratic, but that it should be more democratic than it is.

This argument of the technical difficulties in making the will of the people effective in foreign policy is the one argument which I have most often met, but there is another argument against open diplomacy, which might be called the President's argument. A great many things happen in foreign affairs which would, if generally known, stir the spirit of war. I believe that the President had a profound desire to keep us out of war, and that he therefore kept from the public a knowledge

¹ Address delivered at the National Conference on Foreign Relations of the United States, held under the auspices of the Academy of Political Science, at Long Beach, N. Y., May 29, 1917.

of many things which would have been immediately resented. He tried, I believe, by the use of discretion in regard to foreign relations, to preserve a spirit of peace, feeling that the stirring-up of the people would lead to war; but the answer to that is obvious—that even such guarding of the people from the spirit of war has not kept them out of war.

Those two are the only serious arguments against democratic control which I have encountered. I do not believe that those arguments are the reasons. I think that the reason why our diplomacy here in America, as in the democracies of Europe, continues to operate along the old monarchic lines, is primarily one of inertia. It started that way, and nobody has changed it. It is almost amusing to read today the diplomatic correspondence of the world, and find what an antique tone, what an antique phraseology, has come down to us from the old days, and no one has brought it up to our modern standards. The democratization of life does not follow any uniform course. In every nation you can find out how in some aspects it is more democratic than other nations and in some aspects much less democratic. In all the democratic governments that new movement started by the great revolution has been slowest of all in penetrating the foreign office.

Since the great revolution and the liberalizing of the world, forward-looking men have been interested primarily in internal affairs. The democratization which has been engrossing all thoughtful men is democratization of industry, and it is typical that the liberals of the world were surprised by this war. They had been so interested in their internal problems that they did not give proper attention to their neighbors. To me that fact suggests the one hope of a better future growing out of this war. Never again in our generation will the liberals of the world be indifferent to foreign affairs.

The invasion of the world has not been merely geographic; it has not been merely the overflowing across frontiers. All of our life has been invaded from the outside, all of our pet projects, all of the things for which we have been striving have been attacked from without. We have got to watch beyond the border, and if we do, if we put the same ardor for

better things into our international relations which we have been expending in this effort to improve our internal conditions, the machinery will form itself. After all it is not so much a change in machinery as a change in spirit that we need. We must, and I believe that we will be interested.

There is one other reason, as distinguished from argument, for secrecy in diplomacy. It is not the greatest reason, but it strongly dominates the minds of some people who are opposed to any reform in our diplomatic methods; and that is, the privilege of secrecy. It is a matter that we have had to fight out in our business life. Many business deals are easier to effect if you don't have to tell anybody about them. In our industrial life we have had a constant fight for more and more publicity; we have discovered that it is not for the common weal to allow our large corporations, our large insurance companies, to operate in secrecy. Just so we shall have to insist, and as we become more democratic we shall insist, upon publicity in regard to foreign affairs. It is too important, it touches too intimately our own lives, for us to be indifferent about it. Interest means publicity.

It is not only the wicked, however, who love darkness; it is also the slothful and the inefficient. There are a great many persons in the foreign offices of the world who would retire to private life if such publicity were introduced as I would like to see, and some of those persons who feel their own position rather precarious under such circumstances are among the strongest advocates of diplomatic secrecy. We cannot have efficiency unless we have responsibility, and it is a commonplace in diplomatic discussion today that innumerable mistakes have been made by diplomatic agents on both sides; but the proper ones have not been retired to private life because they have been guarded by the veil of secrecy.

Of course the very foundation of any democratic control in diplomacy, as in every other branch of politics, must be democratic understanding. It is not any change in the laws, nor any change in the rules governing the State Department which will bring about this better understanding. There must be a getting together, an intensive and persistent education; the

people must know about these things. We have already gone a long way from the provincialism of ten years ago. More people in the United States are interested in the world today than were ever interested before. Now, the government should stimulate this interest. Such conferences as this seem to me one of the greatest things that could be done for this cause of democratic control. People must understand the issue. The State Department must introduce itself to the public. It really is not beneath its dignity. The other departments in the government have done it, and the questions involved in the work of the State Department are not much more intricate than those involved in the work of the Department of Agriculture, which is a good example of how the departments can take the people into their confidence in regard to their work. We ought to know as much about the State Department and its problems and policies as we do about the other departments.

One of the most interesting books on war that I have ever read is that of von Clausewitz. It is all centered around one idea. Von Clausewitz is constantly coming back to the statement that war is a movement through a resistant medium. He pictures one type of general who makes a fine and intricate plan, and then does not carry it through, because of friction. Von Clausewitz lists all sorts of things as friction, such as bad roads, unexpected rain, misinformation. The plan, he declares, is only the smallest part of the work of a great general; such a general is the man who can grit his teeth and force his plan through the resistant medium.

The same necessity for forcing plans through exists in time of peace. Life itself is movement through a resistant medium, and this is certainly as true of this campaign for democratic control of diplomacy. The friction which must be overcome is in some cases a sincere belief that it is unwise to trust the people; in some cases it is rank stupidity. If we are going to win this campaign for democratic control, it has got to be by gritting the teeth and pegging away against the resistance. It will not do for us simply to discuss a proper method of diplomacy; we have got to have the will to force it through.